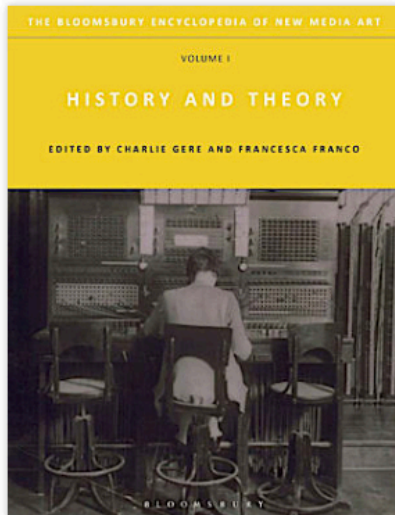


Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

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The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) and Félix Guattari (1930–92) are the Wright Brothers of new media art theory. There are many reasons why they have to be recognized as important intellectual figures to artists, which will be enumerated below. But the first thing to know is that they sought to create concepts that corresponded to the artistic practices of painters, filmmakers and writers.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

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INTRODUCTION

The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Félix Guattari (1930–1992) are the Wright Brothers of new media art theory. There are many reasons why they have come to be recognized as important intellectual figures to artists, that will be enumerated below. But the first thing to know is that they sought to create concepts that corresponded to the artistic practices of painters, filmmakers, and writers.

When they emerged on the Parisian post-May 1968 scene, there were many thinkers and artists who saw the poetic, symbolic, metaphorical dimensions of a work of art as of little importance. Deleuze and Guattari were not among them. Deleuze and Guattari's general approach to aesthetics suggested a possibility of connecting people (both electronically and psychically) to the great chain of being—that which proceeds us and follows us—through a new approach to making and understanding post-modern contemporary art. What had been particular to Post-Modernism before Deleuze and Guattari, was not the creation and inclusion of something *new*, but rather the newly focused concentration on features of the past that were most often previously overlooked.

Some of Deleuze and Guattari's most notable theoretical ideas that impacted art included *affects*, *assemblages*, *body without organs*, *deterritorializations*, *lines of flight*, *planes of immanence*, and (most importantly) the *rhizome*. Such highly creative and erudite theoretical work followed and transformed the wide stream of theoretical art activity that defined much of the art of the 20th century—work intent on practicing different and ever more severe styles of reductionism in a search for imagined art fundamentals (or universals) and media essences. Misguided by a belief in the ever upward progress of scientific technology that was often then conflated into imagined social progress—this long reductive search for essence had stripped away from art and art theory the symbolic and elegiac elements of some of the best art in the history of the Western tradition that began proving its remarkable significance in the prehistoric cave called Lascaux.

The urge for reducing idealisms had become integral to almost all of mainstream Modern Art's emphasis on abstraction, dematerialization, and non-representationalism in the interests of a search for some perceived purity. This ideal search for quintessence peaked and sputtered out in the mid-1970s with the climax of the Minimalist and Conceptualist art movements. Something the philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto described in 1986 as the end of art in his book *The End of Art: The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. But with this sputtering out to an end came a low buzzing noise emitted by every kind of electrical appliance, all of them contributing to a dense noise texture that was the dominant acoustic environment. Such a post-industrial humming environment merged with an increasingly available digital connectivity that began in the mid-1990s. Since then, this electronic atmosphere has been augmented further by a broad spectrum, data monitoring, info-economical environment; with its non-stop background machine-to-machine gigabyte communications, endlessly humming and murmuring away somewhere well under our conscious perception. Stupendous amounts of data flow every second, set in motion with innocuous clicks or taps, as people everywhere download music and movies on iTunes, check their credit card balances, surf for porn, send e-mails, buy every sort of product and service, post their personal data updates on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook, and post art theory papers on online blogs. All this active humming along is both omnipresent and subliminal to most. The same is true of the deep, long lasting influence of Deleuze and Guattari on media art history, theory, and art practice, today.

That is why when the French philosopher Michel Foucault wisely declared that eventually this time will be called *Deleuzian*, he was spot on. Certainly, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical visions re-opened the way in Western art theory for the re-production of symbol and subjectivity and density by affirming the artistic fittingness of *non-hierarchical differences*, of *complex variety*, and of the indispensable desirability of *dissension* in art.

When the writings of Deleuze and Guattari first dropped into the world, some of their key theoretical concepts encouraged edifying eccentricity in art by combining the focus on the vibrant material world of *passé* art and craft techniques with electronics and a wider vision of awareness that included diverse, radical, private, spiritual, ecstatic, and numinous themes made perceivable as art through the generative interpretative skills of individual artists.

Based on reading their small collaborative book *Nomadology: The War Machine* (1986)—that redefined the relationship between the state and war in terms of nomads threatening the authority of the state—Deleuze and Guattari's was an aesthetics of perception-politics based on a plethora of resonances which revealed in minute particulars broad spectrums of the extensive social-political-aesthetic dimension. But unwanted, bad, non-artistic, war machine connectivity is likewise pertinent to Deleuze and Guattari's theories and propositions of connectivity: like black hat hacking and the spread through social media technologies of bot-driven fake news that can tip democratic elections that now depend on digital connectivity and increased data monitoring. Also corporate sales systems

of connectivity that survey and process in real-time personal preferences and movements of users via mobile networks.

CAPITALISM AND SCHIZOPHRENIA AND COLLABORATION

When Deleuze and Guattari began collaborating together on a two-volume book of theory called *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*—consisting of *Anti-Oedipus* (1972, translated into English in 1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980, translated into English in 1987)—Deleuze was a reputable, if daring, French philosophy teacher at Vincennes University. In his early book on the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, Deleuze championed creativity over critique and Deleuze considered himself as a type of artist-philosopher. But his studies on Nietzsche, the French philosopher Henri Bergson, and Baruch Spinoza, the philosopher who merged mind and matter into one substance, were each instrumental in re-activating discussion around these thinkers, whose contemporary significance had somewhat waned. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze's magnum opus philosophical treatise, he developed a profound critique of identity and standard representation that still resonates with today's concerns with identity politics. In it he developed a metaphysics in which the concept of *multiplicity* replaces that of substance, *event* replaces essence, and *virtuality* replaces possibility.

His writing collaborator, Félix Guattari, was a psychotherapist who trained under and was analysed by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in the early 1950s. Guattari became a radical philosopher, a semiologist, and political activist militant director of a nonstandard experimental psychiatric clinic at La Borde in Cour-Cheverny, a commune in the Loir-et-Cher department in the Centre-Val de Loire region of France. His program there consisted of a non-hierarchical suspension of the classical analyst-patient pair in favor of much more open contentions and reconciliations occurring within the context of group therapy sessions.

Guattari's main focus was on the question of *subjectivity* and how to enrich and reinvent it. In philosophic terms, subjectivity is a term used to denote that the truth of some privileged class of statements depends on the mental state or reactions of the person making the statement. In epistemology, (that in Philosophy which is concerned with theories of knowledge) subjectivity is knowledge which is restricted to one's own perceptions. This implies that the qualities experienced by the senses are not something belonging to the physical beings, but are subject to interpretation. In aesthetics, subjectivism is the view that statements about beauty (for example) are not reports of objective qualities inherent in things, but rather cognitive reports of internal feelings and attitudes.

In his book *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (1992, translated into English in 1995) Guattari proposes an analysis of subjectivity in terms of four aspects: (1) material, energetic, and semiotic fluxes; (2) concrete and abstract machinic phyla (a taxonomic category that ranks above class and below kingdom); (3) virtual universes of value; and (4) finite existential territories.

Both men have written about literature and art and art history, and Guattari would later write some art criticism, usually for the Italian art magazine *Flash Art*. In their book *What is Philosophy?* (1991, translated into English in 1994)—by the way, a very good entry point to gently getting a taste of the high-minded nonlinear style of thinking theory Deleuze and Guattari fully establish in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*—Deleuze and Guattari suggest that art, in fact, began with those animals who carve out territories around them.

The important thing about Deleuze, from a post-conceptual art standpoint, is that Deleuze conceived of philosophy as the *production of concepts*. That is why he also characterized himself as a metaphysician.

But Deleuze also produced straight if startling original studies in the history of philosophy: writing on Spinoza, Nietzsche, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, the Scottish philosopher David Hume, Bergson and Michel Foucault. Deleuze also delved into the arts by focusing on the paintings of Francis Bacon, in his book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981, translated into English in 2003) and wrote copiously on film in his two volume Cinema series of books *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983, translated into English in 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Movement-Image* (1985, translated into English in 1989). He also published a collection of essays on literature, wrote a book on Marcel Proust, one on the Bohemian novelist and short-story writer Franz Kafka, and one on the Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.

Of the two *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* collaborative books by Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* had the biggest impact upon media art, experimental music, and painting as they were being reconsidered within the new context of the burgeoning digital revolution: specifically the early-1990s internet culture (a.k.a. cyberculture). This is the case because *A Thousand Plateaus* articulated an epistemology based on the intellectual model of the *rhizome*.

For one, their *rhizomatic theory* encouraged artistic non-linear and non-restrictive interdisciplinary creative thinking and doing. That is why Deleuze and Guattari's art aesthetics have become so embedded in the recognition of arts' sheer potentiality to expand and inform. Rhizomatic theory points out that what we have in common is a dangerous propensity for overrating our powers of comprehension.

Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic aesthetics is hostile to generalizations. It is recalcitrant by design. It affirms with jubilation our state of varied mutability. Indeed, I believe that some form of rhizomatic thinking is a necessity for originality to emerge today, and the recognition of the necessity of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic aesthetics is part of the peculiar pleasure that current art affords. A pleasure clearly of rapturous abandonment, where the intended effect is liberation by means of de-simulation. Their rhizomatic aesthetics opens up in us a sense of possibility that we understand and feel at one and the same time to be both dangerous and indispensable.

RHIZOMATIC THEORY

A biological rhizome, literally, is a root-like plant stem that forms a large entwined spherical zone of small roots which crisscross. In the theoretical writings of Deleuze and Guattari—especially in *A Thousand Plateaus* but also including their key small book *What Is Philosophy?*—the term rhizome is used as a metaphor for an epistemology that spreads in all directions simultaneously. This non-hierarchical and theoretically unlimited connectivity (that they also articulated as concept-acts of *becoming*) not only corresponds to the theoretical global functionality of internet connectivity, but also corresponded to the vivid imagination of inspired-by-technology artists in the 1990s (including the author).

For example, the 1993 Ars Electronica and Golden Nica award winning artists group Knowbotic Research KR+cF used the term *non-locations* for their use of disjointed spatial experiences within their art: a term inspired by the concept of what is called *detritorialisations* in the theories of Deleuze and Guattari. Knowbotic Research KR+cF distinguished such non-locations as aggregates of multi-layered occurrences in physical and electronic space which are non-homogeneous, fragmented, and incomplete; while being at the same time continuous, hermetic, and flowing.

Also Relational Art (and relational aesthetics), a late-1990s tendency in fine art practice originally observed and highlighted by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, took some of its ideas from the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Bourriaud defined the relational approach to art simply as a set of artistic

practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space. The artist can be more accurately viewed as the catalyst in relational art, rather than being above or at the center of things, as art curators usually are.

Such artistic ideals were based on portions of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model, in that a rhizome is a rich spherical labyrinthine ensemble of relations, diversities, connections, heterogeneities, breaks and unexpected links which—non the less—inter-connect as a composite unity. Underlying this aim is a chimeric idea which questions linear and hierarchical structures and seeks to replace them with atmospheric loose structures keyed to a penetrable, reciprocal flow of events.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari had further defined the rhizome as that which is reducible to neither one nor the multiple. It has neither a beginning nor an end, but always a *milieu* (middle) from which it grows and which it overflows. As such, it constitutes linear multiplicities with *n* dimensions, having neither subject nor object.

INTERNET I HYPERACTIVITY

During 1980s Post-Modernism, Modernism's previous formal examinations of the artwork were largely set aside in favor of investigations into art's social and ideological determinants, be they explicit or implicit. Post-Modern art thus aspired to employ the affective capability of easily recognizable popular images.

As Deleuze and Guattari became interested and immersed in the competitive schizo-capitalist global media landscape of late-20th century—which expedited real warring conflicts or peaceful accords—questions of representational rapport became of utmost importance to them. Salient to their concerns was the United States Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) and its initial founding of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET): an early packet-switching network and the first network to implement the TCP/IP protocol suite. Both technologies became the technical foundation of the Internet when ARPANET was decommissioned in 1990. As such, *A Thousand Plateaus* was prescient, as the space of the mid-1990s Internet could not be thought of as a coherent totality other than as a hyper rhizome; for the internet is a very numerous collection of hyper-linked files. Similarly, *A Thousand Plateaus* was designed to be able to be read in hyper non-linear, subjective fashion. The book itself is somewhat non-linear in form and intent, and certainly can be used that way.

In that I am evoking the word hyper here, and the phrase hyper-linked, I shall briefly summarize the basis of the hyper concept as adapted from the procedures of hyper-text, hyper-media, and hyper-reality, for the reader. The structural strategy of hyper-anything includes principles of networked connections and electronic links which give multiple choices of passages to follow and continually new branching possibilities. Following this understanding, the Deleuzeian-Guattarian theoretical model for art then emphasizes self-re-programmability. The style of art privileged here explicitly or implicitly offers a furtherance in envisioning and enacting anti-hierarchical models and modes for perception.

Post-Modernism had opened the door to a plethora of once marginalized heterogeneous genres. Within Deleuzeian-Guattarian rhizome theory, spatial relationships implode into noisy chaotic grounds to the extent that normal figure/ground relationships more-or-less merge, playing elusively with what is suggested, what is repressed, and what is desired. This meant shifts into non-binary visual noise fields where viewers can re-appropriate their capacity of divination. They can more freely visualize content on a subjective basis.

For Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomatic art was a generative and virulent and curative unleashing of subjective forces of reverberation that resonate like a web of inter-connected, molecular, and viral-relational affects and intensities. As such, their ideas of political art is something that participates in vibrant dissonance, deviation, and the conspiratorial.

In understanding their rhizomatic theory, remember that Deleuze and Guattari's view of aesthetics involves the communication of enigma itself. That means they invite each and every subject to want more from the art object experience. They invite subjectivity to look deeper than the picture plane or pop image on a screen. Deleuze and Guattari's approach to art involves looking *into* and projecting *onto* the art object. And in some way interacting with it, as opposed to only looking *at* something. In that sense, their idea of rhizomatic art requires the engagement of active subjectivity and (though perhaps slow) participation on the part of the audience-participant. This corresponds perfectly with what Marcel Duchamp said in 1957 at the Convention of the American Federation of Arts in Houston, Texas: that the creative act is not performed by the artist alone. Spectators bring the art work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus add on their subjective contribution to the creative act.

The act of reading Deleuze and Guattari demands as much. Involving oneself with their rhizomatic theoretical propositions, requires the use of the willing readers' mental creative participation. Fortunately, this is something essential for creating originality within our global climate of shared mass media. The rhizomatic tenants of Deleuze and Guattari's excess cuts against the grain of fast, objective, consensus visibility; to art's great benefit. After Deleuze and Guattari, the worth of contemporary art is in its ability to deliver vigorous and unexpected sensually-embodied implications.

To produce such implications, their labyrinthine aesthetic contains systems of chance operations within its rhizome. That allowed their philosophical vision to lead the way towards socially symbolic, semi-abstract, palimpsest-like, works of art that are full of subjective subliminal excess. This plethora is valuable in that such maximalist rhizomatic art offers society a greater freedom of aesthetic choice (along with greater uncertainty) due to the presentation of excessive amounts of aesthetic material and information via rhizomatic ground/figure collapse.

To further clarify, Deleuze and Guattari's art theory utilized principles of aesthetic rhizomatic noise that put representation and abstraction into interactive play by flipping the common figure/ground emphasis to some extent. This entails intimate acts of seeing and imaging on the part of the reader-viewer as a critique of 'representation' in the aesthetic sense becomes part of a critique of 'representation' in the political sense (and vice versa). As such, Deleuze and Guattari mark a qualitative transformation into the connected non-place of the web, where being and non-being may reverse into each other, unfolding out, and enfolding in, their respective fluxes.

Their rhizomatic methodology encouraged just such interdisciplinary crossings where technology's, art's, and philosophy's previously insular roles (which previously tried to examine their areas as unique, sealed off disciplines) are cross-blended. Certainly Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic theory articulated (in pre-hyperlink nonlinear fashion) the possibility of conceiving and actualizing artworks composed of variously formed segments, stratas, and lines of flight; which involve territorializing as well as de-territorializing objects, medium, and themes. This rhizomatic understanding of inter-connectivity was and remains a particularly important point of consideration for media art theory, as Intermedia, a term used in the mid-1960s by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, took on the characteristics of a universalizing digital medium in the early-21st century.

Already in 1980, Deleuze and Guattari had asserted that what is real in art (and in the world at large) are blocks of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which things are categorized. This is almost a perfect proclamation of the need of free expressive creativity. What is important for artists of all kinds is that the rhizome can be connected with any other point, even while rhizomes remain heterogeneous. According to Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomatic creative activity is boundless in its branching; thus artistic reflections and expressions may cross wide chasms of physical, psychological, thematic, and perceptual spaces as disparate elements and details may be linked together. Just as images and texts and sounds are within the internet. Moreover, a rhizomatic-based art influenced by Deleuze and Guattari is dynamic, and is ceaselessly actualized by the arousal its dynamism produces. Thus rhizomatic-based art is not in accord with some pre-established strategy or imposed configuration.

The rhizome is regularly swarming itself into being as micro and macro factors attract and snap. One cannot declare in advance what its limiting confines are, or where it will (or will not) operate, nor what may become connected and tangled up in the rhizome's multiple dimensions, because the connections do not inevitably plait common types together. Rather a rhizome's multiple dimensions instigate cross-overs between both the highest synthetic level and the slightest, most minute discrete distinctions. Indeed, rhizomatic art is a complication of perceptual vicissitudes so intertwined that it can give birth to different scopes of phenomenological macro-perception.

VIRTUAL BWO

This rhizomatic idea for art, that was articulated before the fact of the communal internet by Deleuze and Guattari, greatly aided in redefining the arts in general as they were being reshaped in the mid-1990s by the arrival of virtual making tools of digitalization. Another example of Deleuze's prescient talents is that—writing way before his collaborations with Guattari—Deleuze established a fundamental concept of our time, with his philosophical explanation of the *virtual*. True to form, Deleuze did so creatively, via the work of Marcel Proust, best known for his monumental novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time; previously known as Remembrance of Things Past), originally published in seven parts between 1913 and 1927. Deleuze first did so in his 1966 book on the previously mentioned French philosopher of flux, Henri Bergson, in Deleuze's book *Bergsonism* (1966, translated into English in 1988). Bergson was the first modern theorist to elaborate what came to be called process philosophy, which rejects static values in favor of values of motion, change, and evolution. In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze identifies three pivotal Bergsonian concepts—duration, memory, and *élan vital*—and shows the relevance of Bergson's ideas to contemporary philosophical debates. Also in *Bergsonism*, Deleuze defined the virtual, via the work of Proust, as *that which is real without being actual and ideal without being abstract*.

Following Deleuze here, Pierre Lévy in his 1998 book *Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital Age* defined virtuality as a complex of trends, tendencies, constraints, goals and forces linked to a creative problem solving process. Lévy also established that the emergence of cyberspace made more pressing certain questions that artists have been posing since Marcel Duchamp's *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (1915–1923, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even) by virtualizing the work of art. Thereby questioning the conventions of its creation, exhibition, reception, reproduction, distribution, interpretation, and the different forms of distinction brought about by 'the work'.

Brian Massumi, the English language translator of *A Thousand Plateaus* and author of *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, was in conspicuous agreement with Lévy. Massumi defined the virtual as those intense tendencies which produce a realm of *potentiality*. But for Massumi, the virtual is also a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari described this free flowing shift into the potentiality of boundlessness as becoming a *body without organs (BwO)*: that is where self-shifting representational planes emerge out of our field of compositional consistency. For the body without organs, according to Deleuze and Guattari—via their interpretation of the wild writings of Antonin Artaud, the French dramatist, poet, essayist, actor, and theatre director—is an insubstantial state of connected being beyond representation which concerns *becomings*. Deleuze and Guattari maintain, in a rather Surrealistic fashion, that all molecular becomings begin with, and pass through, becoming-woman. Becoming-woman is the key to all the other becomings, such as becoming-animal and becoming-imperceptible. The imperceptible is the immanent end of becoming: its cosmic direction.

Deleuze and Guattari go on to say in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the body without organs causes intensities to pass; and that it produces and distributes them in a spatium that is itself intensive, lacking extension. The body without organs is not space nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree (to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced).

According to Massumi, the body without organs is an endless weaving together of singular states, each of which is an integration of one or more impulses. These impulses form the body's various erogenous zones of condensed vibratory regions; zones of intensity in suspended animation. Hence the body without organs is the body outside any determinate state, poised for any action in its repertory. This is the body in terms of its potential (or virtuality) within post-industrial society. This dynamic state is typical of that art which has come to be known as *post-conceptual* but can also be tied to Décadent French theory which was almost the equivalent of the *Fin-de-Siècle* Symbolist theory that aspired to set art free from the materialistic preoccupations of industrial society.

Symbolist theory was formed primarily by the French poets Jean Moréas and Stéphane Mallarmé influenced by Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil) and is concerned with the theme of escape from reality. But while Baudelaire's escapism had been of an essentially emotional and sensual kind, Mallarmé's was of a much more intellectual bent, and his determination to analyze the nature of the ideal world and its relationship with reality is reflected in the two dramatic poems he began to write in 1864 and 1865, respectively, *Hérodiade* (Herodias) and *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (The Afternoon of a Faun). In 1886 Moréas published a declaration which outlined the theory called *Le Symbolisme* (Symbolist Manifesto), thus giving the outlook its explicit name.

DELEUZE AND GUATTARIAN VIRACTUAL POST-CONCEPTUAL ART

Art functions by the felt transmission of ideals which act in exciting other people's feelings, ideals and creativity. Reading Deleuze and Guattari is a discovery that a good deal of the basis for the questioning of the Western artistic tradition can be found in the Western tradition itself if we look with new eyes and ask new questions joined with an interest in non-Western expressions which may offer divergent perspectives on the West's previously totalizing self-image. Instead of stressing the reflective limits imposed by the category of Western art, Deleuze and Guattarian aesthetics attempts to specify resistances embodied within it. Their style of global aesthetics urges the mind towards transformations. Here art theory depends on using the infinite space of the world tied to artistic hyper-chaotic imagination.

Deleuze and Guattarian post-conceptual art is that contemporary art that builds upon the legacy of Duchamp and Conceptual Art: where the concept(s) or idea(s) involved in the work take precedence over traditional aesthetic and material concerns. Post-conceptual art has been traced to the work of Robert Smithson and the intermedia concept employed by Dick Higgins, but is now more often connected to digital art production where the computer code sets the conceptual rules for a physical

production. In my book *Immersion Into Noise* I have identified this post-convergent and post-conceptual trend in 1999 as: *viractuality*.

British philosopher and theorist of Conceptual Art Peter Osborne makes the point that Post-Conceptual Art is not the name for a particular type of art so much as the historical-ontological condition for the production of Deleuze and Guattarian type contemporary art in general. With the increased augmentation of the self via networked electronics, the virtual now co-exists with the actual (thus my term *viractual*) as the digital links up with the organic. Consequently, the Deleuze and Guattarian post-conceptual art object demonstrates an interlaced sense of artistic viractuality that couples the organic with the technological and the static with the malleable. The post-conceptual art aspect of viractualism is essentially a Deleuze and Guattarian prosthetic for the meeting up of the machinic and the corporal dominion.

Essentially, the foundation of Deleuze and Guattarian viractual post-conceptual art is that computer technology has become a significant means to making and understanding contemporary art. Consequently, with Deleuze and Guattarian post-conceptual art, artists are investigating art in its many connected forms by addressing the merging of the computed (the virtual) with the un-computed corporeal (the actual). This merging in Deleuze and Guattarian post-conceptual art begins with the realization that technology disrupts previous rhythms of art and consciousness in light of the data-driven information age.

The Deleuze and Guattarian post-conceptual art object can be further inscribed as a thing of viractual liminality which—according to the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, based on his anthropological studies of social rites of passage—is the condition of being on a threshold between spaces. A key Deleuze and Guattarian conceptual context for media and art is that virtual producing computer technology has become a significant means for the blending of computation with the art object. This merger indicates a subsequent emergence of a new topological cognitive-vision of links between the computed virtual and the sensual corporeal world.

The Deleuze and Guattarian post-conceptual art object recognizes and uses the power of digitization while being culturally aware of the values of bodily (physical) connections to monumentality and permanency—qualities that can be found in some powerful analog art throughout the world and the ages. This indicates and initiates communions of the protoplasmic body to virtual spatial conditions. Consequently, the Deleuze and Guattarian post-conceptual aspect of art articulates a digital-physical sense of culture. Yet remember that Deleuze and Guattari rejected, particularly in the realm of art, the *post hoc ergo proper hoc* (after this, therefore because of this) logical error of assumed causality.

But clearly after Deleuze and Guattari developed and published their complex theory of neuro-philosophical hyper-totality for art, it became the dominant spirit of the end of the millennium. A new and fuller post-humanist understanding of art and technology and life emerged that redefined Post-Modernism's emphasis, that had been merely deconstructive of totalities. One of Deleuze and Guattari's terms for this spirit is *becoming-animal*. For Deleuze and Guattari, for art to become animal is to participate in movement that stakes out paths of escape and crosses established thresholds—to reach a connected continuum of intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds—to the benefit of an unformed matter of de-territorialized flux and of nonsignifying signs—by self-fashioning an artistic map of intensities. But it must be grasped that Deleuze and Guattari's vision is not just that of disorder, but that it also may produce order and stability, even little static worlds, as well as the complete destruction of what is.

Within Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal theory, art emphasizes human and non-human entanglements. Theirs is an art idea that depends on playing out nihilistic negativity by intensifying its

forces into an affirmative nihilism that pushes art towards open de-familiarizations, challenging the artist to think outside of the normal system of human consciousness. Their art theory implicates the very type of problematic instability that the self undergoes in Nietzsche's thought: the cohesiveness of the culture/state distinction—like the cohesiveness of the self/other distinction—disintegrates with the ontological instability produced in such discursive fashion.

But the art and art theory influenced by Deleuze and Guattari was not, and certainly is not, a homogeneous practice; but a complex field converging around perceived weaknesses in the history of art theory concerning purity. For example, *Mille Plateaux*, the German record label founded 1993 by Achim Szepanski and named after *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, published a wide range of audio styles, including experimental electronic music, minimal techno, and glitch noise music. But Deleuze and Guattari's hyper-cognitive impact usually happened (and happens) when the particulars of electronic connectivity are seen as part of an accrual total system by virtue of its being connected to everything else while remaining dissonant.

In like fashion, Deleuze and Guattari also stimulated activist left-political art by placing emphasis on the production of individual subjectivity connected to a political physiology (a function of living systems) through their strong support of emerging liberation movements. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of political leftist art as rhizomatic in form, is also one of resistance in that it is based in skepticism towards simplicity, and undermines market predictabilities, by strengthening personal powers of imagination and critical thinking. In general, their political theory counters the effects of our age of simplification. Effects which have resulted from the glut of consumer oriented poli-entertainment messages which the mass media delivers daily in the interests of corporate and governmental psychological manipulations.

Reading and thinking about the theories of Deleuze and Guattari when they first were published—as now—articulates for politically motivated artists the fact that embedded in our inner self is the non-linear life of the imagination, ripe with its intense drives, suspicions, fears, hates, and loves. Deleuze and Guattari guide those inner-driven artistic and emotional intentions and actions into the wider political-economic world. But they still recognized that an artist's inner world is the only true source of meaning and purpose available for the production of originality in the field of fine art-as-politics.

The Deleuze and Guattari style of nimble gazing and grazing is one way to discover for art students the merging of art and politics as an intense inner life. They ask the young artist (in contrast to our frenzied political data surveillance culture—that exteriority of which also steers young artists to fear the outer perception of the critic and yield to art market familiarity) to consider working with personal, agile, clandestine exchanges based on their own intuitive mind and imagination in conjunctive contact with social-political and art historical abundance.

A PHANTASMAGORICAL AVANT-GARDE LEGACY

The radical and spectacular concepts of Deleuze and Guattari have by now passed through the experimental phase. We all know about the downside of connectivity: art spilling over into entertainment and the dangers of disinformation and psycho-data monitoring surveillance. So it must be stressed that Deleuze and Guattari themselves offered much better ideas that all pointed towards a possible shared future based in the cooperative common ground of sociality. Their ideal was a shared and common human-animal-mineral ground that precedes and surpasses narrow national populist communities. Their central proposition was the creation, partially through art, philosophy and literature, of a commons of contact. Understanding and exchange are to be built politically through the creation of innovative individual-polis assemblages and new modes of organization of the individual-collective from which all benefit. In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari made this clear as the purpose of connected culture.

But remember this: what is important in reading Deleuze and Guattari as art theory is the intentional enigma encountered in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Their radical collective ideas presented here needed to be obscure to the degree that tired old established concepts and institutions (such as the state) could not be easily differentiated out of larger collectives, and thus maintained as cultural truths.

The deep dive into phantasmagorical obscurity and complex mystery encountered when first reading Deleuze and Guattari, I must say, is more and more desirable in a world that has become increasingly data-mined, mapped, quantified, specialized, controlled, and identified in a straight-forward matter of fact way. For those artists that have absorbed their philosophy, the paucity of clean art, read at a fast glance, conceals the riches of associational gazing with respect to Deleuze and Guattari's combinatory dynamics and emphasis on networked and layered creations.

I believe that it is now correct to say that Deleuze and Guattari's principle of constructing patterns of infinite becomings was always inherent in the avant-garde artistic tradition. What might be thought of as avant-garde values. Deleuze and Guattari encouraged the making of art as a style of anti-purist rejections of the tyranny of labels, essential identities, privileged abstractions, and fixed ideas. The phantasmagorical aesthetic enigmas they spun is alluring when intelligible, standard art history is perceived as overly narrow, hollow, trite, or insensitive to the diversity of humanity and the intensity of technology. Their goal was to disrupt instrumental art logic and contradict, counteract, and cancel hollow cultural feelings. As such, they indirectly encourage artists to imagine art as something constructed from the unstable distinctions between subjects and objects. Theirs is an idea of art that embraces the entire spectrum of imaginary spaces; from the infinitude of actual forms to formless voids of virtuality. Subsequently, Deleuze and Guattari challenge the hierarchy of figure and ground, and representation and abstraction, through struggles with rhizomatic fields of signal/noise.

Certainly globalization and the internet is much about world space, so the aesthetics of Deleuze and Guattari must be thought of in terms of spatialization: dimensions, areas, and territories. What space does rhizomatic art clear and what space does it clog? How does rhizomatic art function as an attractor for a gazing-commons and as a repellent in the monstrous era of global data-mining and the digital surveillance state? How can the rhizomatic aesthetic thought of Deleuze and Guattari help us to think and live differently within our smooth and surveyed spaces through challenging conventions of media art? How can we live more intently and intensely in their rhizomatic vision of the cosmos rooted in non-closure, with its yearning for otherness in the non-appropriative mode?

CONCLUSION

Certainly the changing values of the avant-garde have always been interfering with the well-monied channels of artistic production and reception—and these avant-garde values are responsible for expanding the forms and definitions of art itself, as Marcel Duchamp demonstrated. Deleuze and Guattari assert that this expansion can always be done by not ignoring the differences between the personal and the political. On the contrary, their rhizomatic theory encourages realizing and demonstrating how differences resonate together in unpredictable and contingent ways to form—in the words of Gilles Deleuze—*planes of consistency* from which new political-artistic concepts can be formed. But such planes can no longer be a form of *enfant terrible* withdrawal, akin to Duchamp's strategic invisibility. Duchamp's entire artistic activity had been—since the definitive incompleteness of his masterpiece *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* in 1923—an exercise in strategic invisibility, giving rise to objects and events which—because they were apparently too impermanent or unimportant or insubstantial, or because they eluded established genre conventions, or because they confused or diluted authorial identity—evaded recognition as works of art. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari purported a phantasmagorical plunge into what Félix Guattari called the *chaosmosis*—in his

superb small book *Chaosmosis*—where he maintained that the work of art, *for those who use it*, is an activity of *rupturing proliferation* or *extreme impoverishment* that leads to a recreation and reinvention of the subject itself.

What disturbs some people when first reading Deleuze and Guattari, but feeds the imagination of artists of all kinds, is that reading them is somewhat a plunge into a maelstrom of unintelligibility, chaos and exaltation. The reinvention of the subject is difficult and can be painful. But Deleuze and Guattari's non-linear writing style functions as a way of seeing and thinking that reverses the order of figure/ground to ground/figure; collapsing being into a shared state of non-being. That means some kind of ontological implosion. As such, their rhizomatic thinking-method creates for artists an appreciation of ambivalent aleatory (chance) processes that can be truer to the powers of the unleashed imagination—as we are all exploding with brews of dynamic pools of expansion, transformation, and disintegration.

In moments of dealing with their radical style of addressing subjectivity, feelings of collapse-extension-connection are encountered. That is what connects Deleuze and Guattari's theory to contemporary complexity theory and to some areas of information technology, nano-technology, cognitive science, and biotechnology. These moments of collapse-extension-connection in Deleuze and Guattari also accompany the contemporary art development where the static image has become dynamically engaged with the human imagination and personal choices of the viewer. In some cases literally, engaging the participation of the viewer to the point of physical interactivity. In other cases they are engaged conceptually (or post-conceptually) by looking long and hard at the art.

Such forms of aesthetic post-conceptual participation can be a decisive element in offering generative possibilities of development that continue to be interesting and supportive of the creation of originality in art. A post-conceptual generative art (or semi-generative art) is perhaps the most evident example of Deleuze and Guattari's aesthetic concerns, in that generative and semi-generative art serves to produce unpredictable results, both when it is based on arithmetic instructions contained in code, or in other ritual-like rules in which the artist establishes the operational tenets or choices that are calculated to act autonomously or semi-autonomously.

The elaboration of Deleuze and Guattari's generative and degenerative aesthetics was (and is) a move away from the search for purity in art and is a return to the shifting ground on which art experimentalism rests. As such, their wild ideas gave back to art a sense of secret discovery that marked art's beginning in Lascaux as an alternative and phantasmagorical way to express the agitation between form and the ground.

That said, it must not be forgotten that Deleuze and Guattariian aesthetics of generative and degenerative subjectivity suggests (and can produce) stress in the audience, as well as in the artist. One might even feel, at times, an exigent anxiety of ego disintegration. So dedication to its merits might well be described as vaguely heroic, because their phantasmagorical networked art aesthetics can be as creative as it can be destructive. Indeed, it implies an endless struggle between the two. In that sense, their art theory contains within itself a *cul-de-sac* of ill communication; that Deleuze, late in his life, called a *vacuole*.

This vacuole concept of phantasmagorical disconnection and noncommunication comes from Deleuze's 1992 essay *Postscript on Control Societies* where he (very early on) established the notion that control is just as connected to information-communication technology as is liberating freedom. This useful vacuole conception Deleuze extracted out of the work of William S. Burroughs, the American Beat Generation writer and visual artist.

The vacuole is a major part of the plant and animal cell. In biology, a vacuole is like a sac in a cell's membrane, completely bound up inside the cell, but also separate from it. Vacuoles play a significant role in autophagy, maintaining an imbalance between biogenesis (production) and degradation (or turnover) of many substances and cell structures. Vacuoles also aid in the destruction of invading bacteria or of misfolded proteins that have begun to build up within the cell.

Félix Guattari died suddenly, on August 29th, 1992, in La Borde from a heart attack, at only sixty-two years of age. Gilles Deleuze had suffered from a debilitating pulmonary ailment throughout the last twenty-five years of his life and in his last decade, this condition grew more severe. On November 4th, 1995, at seventy years of age, Deleuze took his own life by throwing himself from the window of his Parisian apartment.

But before passing away, Deleuze and Guattari had created for art theory a difficult but productive visualization network that connects form to ground within subjective intuition. Their radically creative aesthetics changed the history of culture and theory and continues to give rise to new thoughts that promote the emergence of new forms of an old story: art.

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